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ABSTRACT

Indigenous populations throughout the world have been deprived of opportunities for advanced education, thus limiting their ability to participate fully in their societies. For 25 years, "Access programs" in Manitoba (Canada) have promoted high postsecondary success rates among people, largely from indigenous populations, with poor histories of educational success. Each Access program provides education for a selected group of previously excluded learners, leading to a specific diploma or degree granted by a Manitoba university or community college. Access programs go beyond equality of access to provide "equality of condition" through student support services. Principles and practices that have proven effective in maintaining success rates are described for the areas of student recruitment, the selection process, integration of student supports, financial support, academic support and remediation, and personal supports. Despite evaluations confirming the effectiveness of the programs, federal and provincial funding has declined considerably since the late 1980s. In addition to a graduation rate of 40 percent (compared to 5 percent for Aboriginal students nationwide), Access programs have contributed to Aboriginal community development and the transition of Aboriginal students to graduate programs. Recent developments in Aboriginal higher education include cooperative arrangements with First Nations, development of culturally relevant training programs to meet specific needs, and recognition of university degree credit for completion of certificate programs. (Contains 17 references and a list of Access programs.) (SV)

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Post-Secondary Education for Indigenous Populations

Paper presented to the International Congress on Social Welfare
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Post-secondary Education for Indigenous Populations[1]

Abstract

Indigenous populations in many parts of the world have been deprived of opportunities to obtain advanced education, thus limiting their ability to participate fully in their societies. Over the last twenty-five years, a series of programs in Manitoba, Canada, have been developed that provide high success rates in demanding programs of post-secondary education to people, largely from indigenous populations, who have poor histories of educational success. This paper reviews briefly the history of these programs, describes the model that has underpinned the programs, identifies some of the outcomes, describes some new program manifestations of these principles, and shows how the approach could be used successfully in many settings, not only with indigenous populations but with other groups who have not had adequate opportunity.

Post-secondary Education for Indigenous Populations

Introduction

One of the legacies of colonialism is the widespread under education of indigenous populations around the world. In almost every setting where one people has been colonized by another, the colonized have been very much under represented in, if not deliberately excluded from higher education. Moreover, the deprived have quite frequently been blamed for their own misfortune, especially in the universities, where a supposed concern over standards is used to justify low rates of participation as well as high failure rates among those who do enter the institution (Unruh & Levin, 1990). The focus of this paper is on a particular program model that has been developed in the Canadian province of Manitoba to try to alleviate this problem.

Some introduction to the Manitoba and Canadian context is necessary at the outset. Canada is a federal state in which the ten provinces have constitutional jurisdiction over education. Although the federal government does play an important role in financing higher education and in directing some aspects of policy, post-secondary education as well as public education is essentially funded by provincial governments, which also have the main responsibility for policy in these areas. Post-secondary education in Canada occurs primarily in colleges and in universities. The university sector resembles that in many other countries, but the college sector differs from one province to another. Although almost all colleges offer technical, vocational and applied programs, in some provinces they are also quite involved in preparation for university or in actual delivery of university programs.

Manitoba is one of the smaller and poorer Canadian provinces. Located in the geographic centre of the country, it comprises 650,000 square kilometres and has a population of about 1 million, 90% of whom live within 150 kilometres of the border with the United States, including about 67% in the capital city of Winnipeg. Northern Manitoba occupies a huge area, but has a population of less than 100,000 people, of whom the majority are Aboriginal[2]. Winnipeg also has a large aboriginal population (estimated at about 10%), as well as a poverty-stricken inner-city and a substantial population of

immigrants who in recent years have been drawn largely from Asia and Latin America. In general Manitoba tends to rank in the lower half of Canadian provinces on indicators related to wealth, such as average income or GDP per capita. Payments from the national government in Ottawa comprise a large proportion - about 40% - of the revenues of the provincial government and thus affect greatly its ability to pay for social services such as health care and education.

The post-secondary sector in Manitoba is constituted by four universities and three community colleges. The universities offer a wide range of general, graduate and professional programs, with The University of Manitoba being much larger than the other three combined. The colleges offer one and two year technical and applied programs and have relatively weak links with the universities.

Aboriginal people constitute almost 3% of the Canadian population but are unevenly distributed across the countries. The largest concentration of Aboriginal people is in the Prairie region, making up 11.7% of the Manitoba population according to the 1996 census (Statistics Canada, 1998). This is a young population; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (1995) reported that in 1993 more than fifty percent of the First Nations population was less than 25 years while only thirty percent of the non-First Nations population was in the under 25 years group. Almost 10% of the Manitoba population under age 15 is Aboriginal. However education levels for Aboriginal people remain very low in comparison to the rest of the Canadian population (Armstrong, Kennedy & Oberle, 1990). For example, the 1991 census in Canada found that only 8,685 people in Canada reporting Aboriginal ancestry held university degrees out of an adult population of some 200,000.

The discrimination, racism, and sexual abuse that Aboriginal people have encountered at the hands of Canadian governments and allied agencies such as churches are well documented (Canada, 1996). In fact, the Government of Canada has recently issued a formal apology to Canada's Aboriginal people and has committed a substantial amount of money to a 'healing fund' as a step in trying to redress these historical wrongs. The education system served as a means to propagate these abuses (Loyie, 1992). Porter

(1965), in his seminal study of Canadian society, identified many of the social problems that continue to pervade Aboriginal society. He stated:

> If suddenly education became as free as the air, many would not choose it. In a free society such a choice is everyone's right, but there is a great deal of evidence that the desire to stay in school and continue to university is related principally to the position which the family occupies in the general social structure, particularly its class position. (p. 172)

The social conditions of the poor and of Aboriginal people in northern Manitoba have not changed significantly since Porter published his study. Porter identified psychological barriers and four social barriers: "inequality of income and wealth," "family size," "regional differences in educational facilities," and "the great influence religion has had on educational policies". And, as a result of their experiences in dealing with non-Aboriginal society many Aboriginal people still harbour deep-seated fears and suspicions about participating in the educational system.

The Programs

Over the past twenty-five years, a series of programs has been developed in Manitoba that collectively have had very significant success in providing high quality post-secondary education to populations, primarily Aboriginal, that had previously been excluded from such education. The main contributor to this effort has been a set of programs collectively called "Access programs". Later in the paper we also describe some recent initiatives that have broadened the access endeavour in important ways.

Each Access program provides education for a selected group of previously excluded learners, leading to a specific diploma or degree granted by a Manitoba university or community college, and based on a common set of practices and principles. The programs are based on the belief that if academic, social, personal, and financial barriers are addressed, minorities and disadvantaged groups, for whom post-secondary education has not been a viable option, will enrol and succeed in post-secondary studies at the same levels as non-excluded members of society. The programs follow the tenets of *equality of*

condition which implies that mere access is not sufficient, but must be accompanied with the kinds of supports that give to students who are motivated, but poorly prepared and under-resourced, a realistic opportunity to succeed (Unruh & Levin, 1990).

Equality of condition is a principle of fundamental importance. Equality of access (or opportunity) is now generally accepted in many places through such vehicles as student financial assistance programs, distance education, off-campus programs, and so on. However a commitment in that direction, while important, still leaves the onus for failure or success almost entirely on the student. It is assumed that the institution opens its doors, but after that each student must make her own way. But acceptance of the idea of equality of condition requires that post-secondary institutions assume some responsibility for students' success as well as entry, with all the changes that implies, some of which are described below.

Along with equality of condition, the Access programs are premised on the approach found in recent literature on "second-chance":

> The notion of second chance is basic to societies which stress the value of equal opportunity and freedom of choice. It is derived from the basic belief that everyone has the right to attempt success and mobility, the right to try again, to choose a different way, and that failures should not be regarded as final. From this viewpoint, the possibility of correcting errors made either by the individual or by the educational system is considered probable. . . . A second-chance structure is a set of organized social activities which enables an individual to actualize this opportunity; after all, people are not born into a reality which is the only one possible and from which there is no escape. (Inbar, 1990, p. 1)

These principles do not mean that everyone may get through the system regardless. They do mean that different people require differing learning strategies, differing lengths of time, differing amounts and types of support, and that these ought to be provided. They also implies a shift in emphasis from maintenance of educational standards by insisting on entrance requirements, to a clear definition of and insistence on exit requirements. The

acceptance of equality of condition as an educational goal moves us from an "opportunity model" toward a "success model".

Since their inception, the Access programs have demonstrated that hundreds of people who were educational failures - who had not completed secondary school, and would never have been admitted, under ordinary circumstances, to a college or university - can enter, succeed, and contribute to the community as well as changing their own lives.

In taking on this task, the programs have had to challenge some important myths about higher education. The most central of these is the supposed inherent incompatibility of accessibility and quality. This position can become self-fulfilling, in that its proponents believe that if a large number of underqualified students fail, it demonstrates their unsuitability, but if a large number succeed, it means that standards have been lowered. As a number of studies, as well as the experiences related in this paper have shown, however, completion rates can be improved without any decline in standards if institutions set out to do so through appropriate teaching and support services (Lavin & Hyllegard, 1996).

The Access programs began in the early 1970s under Manitoba's first New Democratic Party (socialist) government. They were from the beginning intended largely for Aboriginal people, but also included inner-city poor and visible minorities. Until about a decade ago, the federal government contributed more than half the cost of a number of the programs under a variety of agreements with the Province.

Since their inception there have been approximately twenty different Access programs (see Appendix 1). Most have been operated in collaboration with universities, but community colleges have also been involved in several. The programs have provided access to the full range of university studies and to quite a few key technical areas.

The programs are of two types: *general* Access programs that provide students with an opportunity to enter the regular student body, or *specific* Access programs. Open Access programs include the University of Manitoba Access Program (UMAP) from which students may compete with the regular student body to enter any restricted entry program in the University. For example, students from the UMAP may enter such faculties as Law or Management, or may complete a degree in Arts or Science. Red River Community

College, in Winnipeg, offers a similar program at the college level. Programs exist in specific fields such as Engineering, Nursing, Education, Social Work, and pre-medical (which also includes Dentistry and Medical Rehabilitation). There is also a program to provide support in the professional health programs for those who complete preliminary studies and are accepted into a professional health faculty.

The programs themselves do not provide certification. They provide access to the same academic skills and certification that any person would attain in a given academic program. The Access programs modify entrance criteria but they neither set nor influence academic exit criteria. A person does not graduate from an Access program, but from the diploma or degree-granting institution with the same credentials as any other graduate.

In the Access program agreements that were originally established between the provincial government and the colleges and universities, the latter, as the delivering agencies, retained the right to set curricula and delivery model, exit standards, and the granting of diplomas or degrees. The Province established the criteria for identifying applicants and students, program funding, and student financial assistance. This sharing of responsibilities insured that the delivery agency was not selecting students with limited need of program support, but who would enhance the success-rates. On the other side, the academic quality was assured by the delivery institutions so the Province could not be accused of influencing or subverting academic standards for the sake of interest groups.

The programs have varied in some important respects. For example, some are located on the main institutional campus while others operate in separate settings, and one program operates in the communities where students live. Some programs integrate their students into the classes being taken by the general population while others provide separate classes for their students, and some do a combination of the two. However all programs have embodied a similar approach which can be described as "The Access model".

The Access model

Over the years, a set of operating principles and practices has been developed and refined into a system that has proven very effective in maintaining success rates and in opening up new areas of study.

1. Recruitment: Students who enter the programs have historically been adults (90%) who do not meet normal institutional entrance requirements (75-80%), predominantly female (60%), including many parents and single parents, and Aboriginal (75%) (Hikel, 1994). Constant and ongoing recruitment of potential students is necessary, because at least one characteristic of the excluded is the tendency to count themselves out and to view opportunities as being intended for someone else. In the early years of the programs, it was necessary to go out into the byways and to tap shoulders and pluck lapels like Coleridge's Mariner. As the proportion of people with advanced education in the target groups increases, and as Aboriginal people in particular have become more assertive about their rights to education, more students may identify themselves. However, a real commitment to inclusion requires an active recruiting process to reach the target group.

Program staff, and, whenever possible, students, make trips throughout the year to communities from which students might be drawn to present information about the program and identify prospective applicants. Recruitment packets are also sent to schools, organizations and social service agencies and other contacts. Newspaper and radio ads have also been used and a short video (which recently won an award from the Canadian Association for University Continuing Education) has been developed and widely distributed to ensure that the maximum number of potential applicants hear about the program.

2. Selection: Applications to the programs are accepted in the spring of each year. The selection of students takes place in two phases. Prospective students first submit written applications to the program of choice or suitability. These applications are screened for eligibility and the most suitable applicants are then brought to the university for a four day process including an orientation to the program and the university, and then personal interviews. Each applicant receives two interviews from different interview committees. The interview committees consist of university and program personnel,

community representatives, and business and professional representatives. These committees then meet to compare notes and to produce a recommended acceptance list. The program directors select from this list based on the number of available spots.

The selection process is designed to identify, from among those applicants who have been judged eligible, those who have the motivation and ability to succeed given the program supports available. No one who can succeed without the special supports may be selected. No one who will fail in spite of the supports should be selected. This, of course, frequently demands difficult and subjective judgments, and no one can assert that justice is always done or that there is any formula of assured success. In fact, the process is set up precisely to avoid the probability of falling into formulaic approaches. Instead, there is a heavy dependence on a system which resembles the legal jury system, with a maximum exposure between jurors and applicants through interviews, and, where it works best, an insistence on unanimity among jurors rather than on a dependence on a point system or majority rule. The system is imperfect and sometimes quirky, but, over the years, has proven itself effective. Formal achievement or aptitude testing is not done until after admission to the program. It is then done only for diagnostic purposes, in order to determine students' needs for support.

Although the programs select participants, every student must still be admitted to the college or university through which the particular program operates, and such admission is entirely the prerogative of that institution. An applicant, therefore, must be admissible to the institution before he or she may be selected to the program. As a consequence, a vast majority of students enter under the mature student category, which provides entrance for any student over the age of 21 regardless of academic background. A large number of clients who fall between the legal school leaving age and the mature student age remain unserved.

3. Integrated Student Supports: The heart of the ACCESS model is the integrated student support system. It begins from a series of assumptions, all too often asserted and all too rarely observed. They are:

a) That the needs of the students are real and legitimate and can, on the whole, be met.

b) That the students need not and should not be blamed for having those needs.

c) That the various areas of need--financial, academic and personal--are so interrelated and intertwined in the individual, that each affects all, and that success is a product of strength in all.

d) That all three areas are the legitimate concern of those who profess to educate.

e) That any support system which hopes to promote success and to prevent failure must be based on an assessment of where the students are, rather than where it is assumed they should be.

f) That the various services such as financial, academic and personal support, while requiring some specialization, should nonetheless be structurally related in such a way that students do not fall between the cracks.

g) That as much as possible, services must be preventative but must be flexible enough to respond to individual crisis with individual remedies, without the need to create or protect uniformity.

h) That the responsibility for making sure that the students get the required services falls equally on those who deliver those services and on those who receive them, or to put it another way, the program bears as much responsibility for the student's success or failure as does the student. In effect, the requirement for a will in the institution for success is here located structurally as well as attitudinally, in the program and its staff.

Programs vary in the way they organize their staffing to provide these services. Typically some staff members have primary responsibility for the academic well-being of students including the assessment of strengths and weaknesses, tutoring, teaching study and learning skills, academic advising and academic advocacy, and others are trained counsellors who deal with personal and family matters. However, the small size of each program - usually no more than 60 students and fewer than a dozen staff - means that all students and staff know each other. Just as importantly, the staff are all located near each other and structurally related to each other in such a way that it is likely that a problem will

be passed to the proper expert for appropriate action, and that it is convenient to do so. Finally, all services come together in the office of the director of each program, who is ultimately accountable for the well-being of the student in every area.

4. Financial Support: The financial support provisions for the programs have changed significantly and for the worse over the last ten years (as described below). Originally, financial support was provided in the form of a biweekly stipend at a level which, while low, made it likely that students would not drop out for purely financial reasons. The stipend was tied to family income and to the number of dependents. In addition, there were a series of categorical supports such as child care, housing, transportation and medical care, which were available automatically to students who met the criteria. Finally there was a modest sum which could be distributed at the discretion of the director in exceptional cases and for emergencies. For students who are just making it, and who have no recourse, a small "bail out" frequently made the difference between staying and leaving.

Since 1988, both the federal government has withdrawn completely from supporting the programs, and the provincial government has decreased its support, with the result that Access students now receive very little special financing. They must provide their own funds from regular student aid programs or from some other source. The decline in financial support has significantly weakened the programs' capacities.

5. Academic Support and Remediation: Different programs employ different strategies for dealing with academic deficiencies, largely because of the constraints which the various institutions imposed when the programs were being developed and negotiated. The differences may be grouped into three main categories. Each embodies some element of curricular change and some element of additional learning time. The difference between them has to do with the extent to which the basic program is modified to accommodate the needs of the students, as opposed to changing the students to fit the existing program.

a) Some programs provide significant amounts of skills upgrading before the students actually begin the program itself. This is only done in cases where all other

strategies are impossible because of the structure of the course or the unwillingness of the institution to make allowances.

b) In some cases, students have reduced course loads, meaning that they spread the initial part of the program over a longer time, and are surrounded with steady, ongoing tutorial help.

c) In some cases foundation courses have been changed to be extended in time and include all necessary remediation within the courses. An example is the specially-designed basic courses in the premedical program, which provide premedical sciences on the assumption that students have no secondary school science background at all. Some of the community college programs have converted entire two-year courses of study into three-year, fully integrated courses which are based on the assumption that students do not have the necessary background.

Over the years the programs have learned some lessons about academic remediation:

a) Integrating remediation into the formal process through a credit course or program is the most effective and produces the greatest success, chiefly because students can see a direct link between the activity, which may be difficult for them, and their goal. Motivation is crucial for people who have no experience of success in formal education.

b) Where integration is not possible, front-end remediation works best when it is directly related to the course of study. For example, given a nursing program, courses are carefully analysed to identify those skills and knowledge which must be brought to the courses. These are then provided. There is no pretense of providing a general arts and science background.

c) General upgrading such as Adult Basic Education or General Educational Development is of the most limited value, because, all too often, students lack the experience to be able to project the relevance of these programs into the subsequent "real" course.

d) Students do better in, and profit more from, credit courses than from non-credit courses.

6. Personal Supports: By far the most difficult area is providing personal and family supports. Assuming adequate financial support, more students drop out of the programs for "personal reasons" than all other reasons combined. (In fact, academic failure comes last as a reason for leaving.) Many of the students are not only re-entering formal education, in which they have a history of failure, but also leaving their home community and the life they know. Family stress, discrimination, loneliness and an alien environment combine to overwhelm students and require from program staff compassion, a hard-headed approach to life and school survival skill development, and some solid strategies to deal with real problems. The fact is that post-secondary institutions remain largely unfriendly territory for students from the target groups, although this situation is changing slowly.

Some history

As noted earlier, the Access programs began more than twenty-five years ago. The first years were spent developing programs and increasing the range of areas they addressed. These were exciting years of expansion. However in the mid or late 1980s, the climate began to change as part of the general trend to less public spending and fewer government services.

From the beginning the programs have had critics who contended that it was impossible for under prepared students to meet the normal standards of the institutions. Moreover, the programs were relatively expensive, costing, including student allowances, in the order of $15,000 to $20,000 per enrolled student per year, or in the order of $60,000 to $120,000 per graduate given a 40% overall graduation rate from a range of two and four year programs (Hikel, 1994). (Comparing the costs of Access programs to those of regular college or university programs is difficult because the Access costs include student allowances, which are not counted in ordinary program budgets, but do not include all the costs of instruction for those programs that integrate students into regular classes.)

Once governments in Canada began trying seriously to reduce their expenditures the Access programs were under budgetary pressure. They have been subject to regular external evaluations to determine if they were, in fact, successful. Indeed, they have faced

considerably more scrutiny than have most other programs operated by governments, colleges or universities.

The first major review (Salasan, 1987) was commissioned by the federal Department of Regional Industrial Expansion, then a major funder of the programs. The report gave a resounding affirmation for the continuation of the programs, noting that they were highly cost-effective but provided insufficient financial support to students and did not have enough Aboriginal staff. However, the ink was barely dry when the Federal government began the process for winding-down its financial involvement, which had been close to $5 million per year. As soon as the Federal government announced that it was not prepared to provide further funds, the Provincial Government stated that it would not be able to continue the programs. In June of 1990, The provincial Minister of Education wrote to the universities exercising the government's prerogative to cancel the contractual arrangements.

This Provincial action resulted in massive demonstrations, which occurred at the same time as an important and very visible confrontation between a Mohawk community and the provincial and federal governments at the town of Oka in Quebec. Large crowds at public forums in Manitoba expressed their disenchantment with the federal and provincial governments' treatment of Aboriginal people. Partly as a result of this public outcry, most of the programs were salvaged but in a much harsher and meaner economic climate. Total funding to the programs has fallen by close to 50%, financial support to students in the programs has been cut dramatically, enrolments fell substantially (with admissions declining by about a third), and several programs have been closed entirely. The remaining programs now operate on a year to year basis without a formal contract.

The Access programs and the students were not the only ones to feel the cuts that resulted from the demise of federal funding. The whole adult education wing of the provincial Department of Education was severely cut. Only recently has adult education and training regained some of its former stature as a major government focus. The new impetus began with the release of a major study on post-secondary education in Manitoba, that was chaired by former Premier Duff Roblin (Report of the University Education

Review Commission, 1993). The Roblin Commission also noted the successes of the Access Programs and advocated not only for their continuance, but also for an expanded and broader role for the Access model.

The Provincial Government then commissioned another public study with the not-too-hidden-agenda of closing the Access Programs. This study by R. S. Hikel of KPMG Management Consultants for the Department of Education and Training stated unequivocally that the Access Programs were highly effective in graduating students from the target groups and should be continued.

Despite these studies, the early nineties saw large cuts in financial assistance to students. Allowances were reduced in 1990 and eliminated by 1993 with the exception of a small amount for students who could not be fully supported by student loans. Those students who were Status Indians had to obtain financial support from their Bands, just as Bands were facing the problem of supporting an increasing number of high school graduates with static budgets. In 1994, the program budgets were reduced again to include only salaries and some operating funds, but no monies for orientation or transition costs, or funds for student emergencies. A provincial program that supported the education of people on social assistance was eliminated in 1995.

Hikel's report (1994) noted that the decreased financial support had resulted in a very substantial decrease in the total number of students in the Access programs and also a change in the typical Access applicant. The loss in student funding has meant that many people who most need the programs and for whom the programs could do the most good are no longer applying. For example, potential applicants with children cannot survive on the reduced contribution available, so the number of single parents has dropped. Participation of Métis students has dropped dramatically. They often come from the same socio-economically deprived communities as First Nations people, but they do not have access to funds for education. And partly because of the pressure to improve graduation rates, (though also partly because there are many more better-prepared students from the target groups) the programs now take fewer students with less than twelve years of education (Hikel, 1994).

Outcomes

While the Access programs have been suffering cuts in funding, both for students and for the programs themselves, evidence of their effectiveness has been piling up. The Hikel report put it this way

> ...in the last nine years the program has admitted about 2,400 students, of whom about 1000 have graduated with either a community college diploma or a university degree. This is a graduation rate for this period of about 41.8%. We know of no other Access-like program in Canada that can claim such success. One of the program's most notable achievements is the graduation since 1987 of eight Native physicians... as well as five engineers of aboriginal ancestry and three dentists. The program has also produced 250 teachers, 175 social workers, and 250 nurses.... This is a remarkable achievement. (1994, p 8)

The 40% success rate in the programs is noteworthy because of the lack of standard preparation of the students. In comparison, a recent estimate was that only about 5% of Aboriginal students who entered Canadian universities actually graduated (Hull, 1987).

Students entering the Special Premedical Studies Program have had an excellent record of success in being admitted to and completing professional programs. As of the fall of 1994, 11 of the 51 aboriginal doctors and three of the five Aboriginal dentists in all of Canada were University of Manitoba Access graduates (Nairne, 1994). Most recently, external accreditors in reviewing the University of Manitoba Faculty of Medicine, stated that "one of the outstanding strengths of the medical school and the university is the Aboriginal Student Program: SPSP. It is an outstanding model for Canada that has creative and dedicated leadership." (Correspondence Associate Dean of Medicine C.P.W. Warren to Director of ACCESS Program W.J. Alcorn, March 26, 1997).

Also important in thinking about the programs is their contribution to the development of Aboriginal communities, which continue to suffer from high rates of poverty and unemployment. Many Access graduates have gone back to their communities to work. In this regard they provide role models for young people and also generate

economic activity in the community. That Manitoba has a higher proportion of its Aboriginal population with complete post-secondary education than do other provinces (Wilson & Wilson, 1995) will surely contribute to the social and economic development of many of our poorest and most isolated communities. Many Access graduates have also gone on to graduate education and many hold key leadership positions in the Aboriginal community in Canada. In short, the programs have done a great deal to assist their intended clients in obtaining relevant and high quality post-secondary education, even though people from the target groups continue to be greatly underrepresented in higher education.

Recent Developments and the Future

Ironically, while the Access programs have faced declining financial support from government and therefore reduced enrolments, the model has been adopted elsewhere in Canada, and other important initiatives in Aboriginal education have been taking place in Manitoba. Lakehead University in northwestern Ontario, in a region with a large Aboriginal population, has adapted the Access model for its own programs in Engineering, Nursing and Education. The Dean of the University of British Columbia Faculty of Applied Science commissioned in 1992 a study of engineering access programs available to students of native descent in the western United States and Canada. The summary of this document states:

> ...two Universities' programs stand out: The University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Manitoba, which offers the Engineering Access Program (ENGAP), and the Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, which offers the Native Access Program for Engineering (NAPE). These two programs provide not only solid academic and financial support, but also considerable social and cultural support to help ease the transition process to university for many native students. (Braham, 1993, p. 2)

Saskatchewan has also created college and university programs that use many of the same principles.

Over the last twenty year, First Nations have been assuming increasing control over their own education, with the result that graduation rates from high schools on reserves, though they remain low in comparison to other groups, have been improving steadily. First Nations have also been targeting their funds for post-secondary education and have been increasingly assertive about what they expect from colleges and universities in return for the fees they pay. As a result largely of pressure from Aboriginal groups, several new program models have been developed in Manitoba.

One model provides partial or complete degree programs delivered in Aboriginal communities through contractual arrangements between the University of Manitoba and several different First Nations. Some communities are operating Transition Year programs in which students are able to complete a full year of university studies in their home community, including some of the same kinds of supports as are provided in the Access programs. More ambitiously, programs to provide a full professional degree in First Nations communities are operating in Education, Social Work and Nursing in several places in Manitoba. These programs, too, have had their growing pains as all parties struggle to develop effective means of working together and as efforts are made to provide effective, high quality programs to students many of whom do not have the standard preparation. The approaches pioneered in the Access programs and described earlier are highly relevant here, but for various organizational and financial reasons have not always been built into programs from the start. Where these programs are most successful, it is because they work closely with the First Nations partners, provide additional academic and personal supports where necessary, and seek to include Aboriginal knowledge and culture in their curriculum. For example, the Faculty of Nursing has been redesigning many of its courses so that they are appropriate to nurses working in northern Aboriginal communities and so that they take advantage of traditional forms of knowledge about health and healing.

The struggle to incorporate indigenous people's knowledge is also a key element in another exciting University-Aboriginal partnership program. This is the National Environmental Education and Training Program (NEETP), which is run jointly between the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER) and The University of

Manitoba. The NEETP involves two years of full-time study for a small group of young people selected from First Nations all across Canada who are being trained to do many aspects of environmental work. As Aboriginal groups are involved in land claims, or try to cope with the damage wrought by industrial developments (such as pollution of waterways by pulp mills) or with resource exploitation efforts on their land, they need people who have the knowledge and ability to deal with environmental concerns. What is most exciting about NEETP is that the program seeks to combine what might be called 'western scientific' knowledge with what might be called 'traditional Aboriginal' knowledge about the environment. Courses are co-taught by scientists and Aboriginal elders. The work of integrating these diverse perspectives into a single program has been arduous but also tremendously exciting.

Students are currently graduating from the NEETP with a Certificate granted by the Continuing Education Division of The University of Manitoba. However in a breakthrough development, students who complete the program are being granted two full years of credit towards a Bachelor of Science Degree in Environmental Science at The University of Manitoba (generally a complete certificate earns about one year of credit in a degree program). And CIER is currently looking at changing the program so that it is entirely made up of degree credit courses and so would be transferable to any recognized university.

The recognition of degree credit for certificate programs has been a thorny issue at The University of Manitoba in another respect as well. For years, the Continuing Education Division has offered a number of certificate programs that are primarily directed towards the needs of Aboriginal communities. However students seeking to use those programs for advanced standing towards a degree in a related faculty (such as using a certificate in counselling towards a Bachelor of Social Work) have been frustrated by the unwillingness of academic units, for a variety of reasons, to grant significant credit. In the past two years, however, the University has made considerable effort to improve this situation and the integration between certificate and degree programs has improved substantially.

In a related development, the University has developed a new type of credential, called a diploma. The diploma consists of existing degree credit courses drawn from various faculties and put together in a new program package that meets a recognized need. The first such program, in Community Wellness, uses courses from Arts, Social Work, Nursing and Pharmacy to provide a coherent program for people working in the general area of mental health in First Nations communities. The diploma is administered by the Continuing Education Division in collaboration with the Manitoba Community Wellness Working Group, and is the result of a formal partnership between the University and the Working Group, a creation of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, which itself represents all First Nations in the province. The courses in the diploma are being redesigned to increase their relevance of the intended clientele, and the entire program is being delivered off-campus in a specially formatted and designed program structure. However the courses are all fully transferable into regular degree programs of the University. The diploma structure thus provides an effective bridge allowing the University to meet identified community needs without shutting doors for students interested in further study.

Both the NEETP and the Community Wellness program embody many of the principles of Access programming, including careful selection, the provision of academic and personal support, and the development of programs and instructional approaches that take into account the backgrounds of students while admitting at no point a lower set of expectations for graduates. As always, these efforts are contentious and difficult, but they also exemplify exciting new approaches not only for our institution but for education of the disadvantaged generally.

The University of Manitoba has also been slowly improving its other supports for Aboriginal students, most notably by developing an Aboriginal Student Centre. Gradually awareness has been growing that working effectively with Aboriginal students and communities is a fundamental part of the University's mission, and the recent Strategic Planning Task Force identified one of the University's goals as becoming the "first choice institution of higher education for Aboriginal people" in Manitoba and beyond.

Much remains to be done, however, if this goal is to be realized. There are still many within the institutions and outside them who see a fundamental conflict between accessibility and quality, who believe that if too many students graduate it is a sign of poor quality, and who do not see any need for the institutions to modify any of their traditional practices. Government commitment to accessibility remains at best ambiguous, with declarations of support but also higher tuition fees and reduced financial assistance.

The Access programs have played a vital role in demonstrating that with appropriate supports, many people who would ordinarily be excluded from higher education can enter and succeed. They have shown that we are badly under using the abilities of our Aboriginal population. And they have made an important contribution to the social and economic health of Manitoba. There is some evidence that the long-sought general commitment of post-secondary institutions to the disadvantaged and marginalized is once again improving. Perhaps the new millennium will finally see the realization of the hopes of those who have fought and worked to provide effective post-secondary education for the excluded, not only for their benefit but for the good of all of us.

Notes

1. Research reported in this paper was supported financially by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada through the Western Research Network on Education and Training. All opinions are solely those of the authors.

2. The nomenclature around Aboriginal people of Canada is quite complex, since the terms in common use by the majority population are not those accepted by Aboriginal people themselves. In the briefest terms, the word "Indian" is primarily a legal term to refer to those people who have the status of registered Indian as defined by the federal Indian Act (relating to treaties and the particular relationship between a very diverse set of peoples and the Government of Canada). These groups of people now tend to use the term 'First Nations' to refer to their own communities and governments. The Inuit (formerly known as Eskimos) are the Aboriginal inhabitants of parts of northern Canada. Métis is a term

used to refer to the group of people who were originally - 150-200 years ago - the produce of unions between Indian and white parents. The Métis see themselves as a distinct people, as the only group that actually arose in North America, and as having land and other legal rights that have not yet been adequately recognized by the federal and provincial governments of Canada. For further information see Young & Levin, 1998.

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Appendix 1: List of ACCESS Programs[1]

type	PROGRAM NAME	ACRONYM	COURSE LENGTH	EXTENDED LENGTHo
G	University of Manitoba Access Program	UMAP	3 to 5 ½ years	3 to 5 ½ years
S	Special Pre-medical Studies Program	SPSP	2 to 3 years	3 to 4 years
G	Professional Health Program	PHP	3 to 4 years	3 to 4 years *
S	Northern Bachelor of Social Work	NBSW	4 years	5 years
S	Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Program	BUNTEP	4 years	4 1/2 years
G	Community College Access Program (north and south)	CCAP	2 years	3 years
S	Northern Nursing Program	NNP	2 years	3 years
S	Winnipeg Education Centre - Social Work	WEC-SW	4 years	5 years
S	Winnipeg Education Centre - Education	WEC-ED	4 years	5 years
S	Southern Nursing Program	SNP	2 years	3 years
S	Engineering Access Program	ENGAP	4 years	5 years *
G	Access North - The Pas	AN	1 to 3 years	1 to 3 years
S	Access North - Thompson (civil tech)Ω	AN	2 years	3 years
S	Access North - Winnipeg (elect. tech) Ω	AN	2 years	3 years
Other "access" Programs				
S	Aboriginal Law Students		These programs have adapted and/or adopted various components of the traditional ACCESS model.	
S	Aboriginal Business Program			
S	Norway House Bachelor of Nursing			

type = specific (S) or general (G)
o = Program Directors could extend support for six months and the PSCD Director could authorize a further six months.
* = Student in this program received special consideration for an extra year of extension.
Ω = Program has been cancelled (Also: Business Skill Integrated in Thompson)

[1] adapted from: Post Secondary Career Development Branch, Student Allowance Policy Manual, Manitoba Department of Education and Training (1988, revised 1989), p. 42.